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REMARKS OF
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT S. McNAMARA
AT THE ANNUAL NATIONAL VETERANS DAY CEREMONY
ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY
NOVEMBER 11, 1962 -- 11:00 A.M. (EST)

This is a day when we honor silence above speech. Therefore, I shall be brief.

We began the day by paying tribute to men whom we cannot name. Yet our memory of their deeds is as fresh as the wreath we laid on their graves and as enduring as the light of the torches brought here from far away. The strength of this memory is the measure of our obligation to every veteran, known and unknown. We renew that obligation by this ceremony.

A year ago, speaking on this occasion, President Kennedy observed that, "there is no way to maintain the frontiers of freedom without cost and commitment and risk." He added, "there is no swift and easy path to peace in our generation." The hard truth of his remarks has been demonstrated for all of us by the events of the last few weeks.

The men and women, living and dead, whom we honor here today learned that truth through their own experience. It is the mark of a civilized society that later generations profit from the experience of earlier ones. Today it may be the mark of a society that can survive to pass anything on to future generations. The margin for error is shrinking.

Let me tell you what I see as some of the lessons that can be derived from the experience of our veterans -- lessons which we have tried to apply over the last few weeks.

The first lesson is the lesson of strength. Two World Wars have taught us that weakness, not strength, invites war in a world which is still only beginning to see the possibility of a rule of law. We must be strong enough to defend ourselves, with our allies, against any nation that would try our strength, and the strength of the Alliance.



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The second lesson is the lesson of resolve. We know that a nuclear holocaust would be a disaster of unimaginable proportions, but we know also that unless we are prepared to place everything at risk, we cannot hope to save anything from disaster. We must be resolute enough to commit ourselves to the ultimate test, if our adversaries put us to that test.

The third lesson is the lesson of restraint. Once we are prepared for a thermonuclear showdown, we can afford to use all our patience and all our ingenuity to avoid one -- and we cannot afford to do otherwise. We must constrain ourselves to employ the least amount of force that is effective to determine the immediate issues between our adversaries and ourselves.

These lessons, like all the lessons of the soldier, are easy to forget in the heat of battle. They must be learned in advance, and deeply understood.

There is another lesson that every veteran has learned. Wars solve no problems by themselves. They only give us another chance to work on the problems that lead to wars. In fact, the problems of war and the problems of peace cannot be separated from each other. Individual freedom is both a condition and an objective of a peaceful world, and inequality of opportunity is as much a source of international difficulties as it is an obstacle to domestic tranquility. We need better schools not only to train scientists and engineers for national defense, but also to produce experts who can find economical ways to turn salt water into fresh. And we need to educate humanists who can teach us how to use less of our working time destroying each other and less of our leisure time destroying ourselves.

These problems are the greatest challenge that this occasion puts before us. It must not be said that those whose sacrifice we celebrate fought and died in vain.

We honor our veterans better by silence than by speech, so that we can remember what they meant to us and what they did for us. And we honor them better with actions than with words, using the freedom for which they fought to build the future in which they believed.

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